

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
June 10, 2005

ITEM: 17

SUBJECT: **SDSU 2005 CAMPUS MASTER PLAN REVISION /
PASEO REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Consideration and possible action on the Conservancy's comprehensive comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for SDSU's 2005 Campus Master Plan Revision / Proposed Adobe Falls Development. The Executive Officer will present a brief status report on her analysis and preliminary findings. The Board may take an action.
(Deborah Jayne)

PURPOSE: Information and discussion item. This item is included to update the Board on the status of the San Diego State Draft Environmental Impact Report and provide an opportunity for further Board member discussion and direction.

DISCUSSION: At the April 8, 2005 Board meeting, the Governing Board adopted Resolution 05-07 directing the Executive Officer to prepare and submit comprehensive comments on the *SDSU 2005 Campus Master Plan Revision, Draft Environmental Impact Report*. The Resolution further directs the Executive Officer to submit those comments directly to the Board of Trustees of California State University, if necessary, due to timeline constraints. Additionally Resolution 05-07 recommends the conduct of an *area-wide* hydrology assessment prior to development activities and authorizes the Executive Officer to work with appropriate parties to take immediate actions to preserve the remains of the small Adobe Falls Dam and flume believed to be present on site.

Draft EIR Appears Inadequate

I have made a preliminary review of the Draft EIR but have not yet completed the Conservancy's written comments. Based on my preliminary review, the EIR appears to be inadequate with respect to potential impacts to biological resources, water quality, hydrology, cultural resources, and most importantly, cumulative impacts.

Cumulative Impacts: SDSU / Adobe Falls Project and Grantville Redevelopment Project

As you know, a portion of the Grantville Redevelopment Area, is located on Alvarado Creek less than one mile downstream from the proposed Adobe Falls development. Yet from what I have seen so far, it appears that the Grantville Redevelopment Project was not evaluated, or even mentioned, in the SDSU draft EIR.

Similarly as you will recall, the SDSU/Adobe Falls Development Project was not evaluated, or even mentioned, in the Grantville Redevelopment EIR that was certified by the City Council on May 17. In my opinion, each of these projects need a *thorough* environmental review; both individually as well as on a cumulative basis. As just one example, I believe the neighboring Grantville Redevelopment and SDSU Adobe Falls development projects provide strong support for the conclusion that "Cumulative Impacts" were not adequately addressed in either of the draft EIRs.

Both projects involve the conversion of pervious groundcover (e.g., sediment and vegetation) to impervious hardscape (e.g., concrete, roof tops, parking lots and streets). That conversion, coupled with the accompanying addition of important new pollutant sources (e.g., people, cars, buildings, domestic and feral animals, etc.), will result in an increase in the volume and velocity of urban runoff and cause an increase in pollutant loading to receiving waters (in this case, Alvarado Creek and San Diego River). These changes occur because pavement and concrete, unlike soil and vegetation, can neither absorb water nor remove pollutants, hence the natural filtration and assimilative capacity of the land are lost.

In summary, as a result of these two changes associated with development, (i.e., conversion to hardscape and increase in pollutant sources), the runoff leaving a developed urban area is significantly greater in volume, velocity, and pollutant load than pre-development runoff from the same area.

The increased volume and velocity of runoff from developed urban areas greatly accelerates the erosion of downstream natural channels. Numerous studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between degree of imperviousness of an area and the degradation of its receiving water quality. Significant decline in the biological integrity and physical habitat of

streams and other receiving waters have been found to occur with as little as a 10% conversion from natural to impervious surfaces. (Developments of medium density single family homes range between 25 to 60% impervious.) Today “percent impervious coverage” is believed to be a reliable indicator and predictor of the water quality degradation expected from planned new development.

The proposed SDSU / Adobe Falls project, in combination with the Grantville Redevelopment Project, will result in potentially very significant impacts to Alvarado Creek and the San Diego River, especially since the confluence of the two is already prone to serious flooding. An overall area-wide hydrology assessment should be the common sense first step before either EIR is certified and before either of these projects proceed.

The proponents of both projects are well-known nationally recognized entities with significant resources behind them. Both projects are large and individually both have significant potential to adversely impact receiving water hydrology and water quality. As discussed above, the cumulative impacts of these projects together will be significantly greater than the individual project impacts. The cumulative impacts of these projects must be evaluated. Both projects have been in the planning stages for some time and they are physically located side-by-side on Alvarado Creek, near its confluence with the San Diego River, and within less than one mile of each other. Yet neither EIR acknowledged the neighboring development.

Large-Scale Hydrology Assessment

I think the SDSU Adobe Falls / Grantville Redevelopment Project example also clearly illustrates the strong need for a large-scale area-wide hydrology assessment. Both EIRs promise individual hydrology assessments on a “case-by-case” or “project by project”, i.e., “piecemeal” basis. The piecemeal approach will miss the big picture and will most certainly miss (or underestimate) the cumulative impacts of multiple projects. One has only to look as far as the existing development in Mission Valley today and its cumulative impact on the San Diego River to see that the “piecemeal” approach to impact assessment does not work.

Other similarities between the Draft EIRs for the two projects also stand out. They both often assert that their project will (1) either “have no significant impacts” or (2) “have significant impacts but the impacts will be lessened to “below significant

levels” after the application of best management practices”. Yet neither document provided evidence to support this conclusion. Several conclusions are simply not persuasive and do not appear to be supported by fact. Both draft EIRs seem to dismiss some potential impacts quite easily and in a somewhat cavalier manner (see example below).

”No Significant Impacts to Cultural Resources”

Below is a verbatim excerpt from the SDSU/ Adobe Falls Draft EIR which serves to illustrate my assertion that potential impacts are sometimes dismissed rather easily and in a somewhat cavalier fashion. I find the excerpt below to be particularly disturbing. On page 3.4-16 under the Impacts to Cultural Resources section, the EIR states:

“As noted above, the Adobe Falls site is listed as a City of San Diego Historic Site natural resource. The feature was used by Native Americans, the Mission San Diego de Alcalá, and by subsequent farmers as a source of water. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Adobe Falls were documented as a place used for bathing and swimming. The actual Adobe Falls natural resource has been partially destroyed by construction of old Highway 80 (the Alvarado Freeway), and the eventual straightening of the I-8 alignment. Only a small portion of the natural feature remains. The result of road building impacts has left the Falls in a precarious state, so much so that the Falls have lost their original integrity. Because the remaining portion of the Falls have lost their integrity and, therefore, are no longer worthy of local historic register status, no significant impacts are expected in connection with the proposed project.”

To my knowledge, the Adobe Falls parcel (and parcels in the immediate vicinity) are still registered as “City of San Diego Historical Site 80—Adobe Falls”. Sadly, the “it’s ruined already” mentality seems to be a fairly common argument to support the conclusion that it’s ok to further degrade an already degraded resource.

Inconsistency with Important Planning Documents

Although I haven’t had time to confirm this, it appears that portions of both these two projects EIRs *may* be inconsistent with parts of one or more of the following planning documents: Navajo Community Plan, City’s Draft River Park Master Plan, Conservancy’s Enabling Statute, Foundation’s Conceptual Plan for the River Park, and the governing NPDES Municipal Storm

Water Permit. For example, the following is an excerpt from the 1982 Navajo Community Plan (on page 56) (**Supporting Document 8**):

“OBJECTIVES FOR OPEN SPACE RETENTION AND UTILIZATION

Because there is pressure for intense use of land located within the urban complex, the following principal or overriding open space objective was adopted:

DESIGNATE AND PRESERVE OPEN SPACE BEFORE DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE.

In this way, it is possible for the best land available for recreation and open space to be preserved to provide a framework for subsequent development. The assignment of a high priority to recreational open space development requires immediate action if preservation is to take place.

The Navajo community recognizes that there is a need to provide adequate and accessible open space for the needs of the population and that without positive action the community may lose this valuable open space through the development of the river area, canyons and hillsides. Therefore, the following additional objectives were adopted:

- Preserve, improve and reconstruct the wetlands and riparian habitat areas in and along both sides of the San Diego River.*
- Enhance and maintain the aesthetic and recreational qualities of the San Diego River corridor as part of the open space system.*
- Conserve the present amenity of Navajo, Rancho Mission, Mission Gorge and other canyons for the enjoyment of this generation and as a legacy for succeeding generations.*
- Establish and preserve a total open space system in perpetuity and guard against its commercialization. Preserve the natural environment including wildlife, vegetation, and terrain.*
- Permit only those uses within the system that are compatible with the open space concept.*
- Insure that any public improvements such as roads, drainage channels and utility services and any private lessee*

developments be compatible with the objectives of the open space system.

- *Insure that development of properties adjoining the open space system is in a manner compatible with the natural environment and in conformance with the Mission Trails Design District and Manual, the San Diego River Wetlands Management Plan, and any subsequently adopted programs which address the San Diego River area.”*

Program EIR

I am also concerned about the use of a “Program” EIR (for SDSU and Grantville) which does not adequately address the potential impacts, because the initial Program EIR *may* become the only environmental review required for the project and its subsequent proposed development. For example if the Program EIR is eventually certified as adequate, and the governing entity makes the finding that any new impacts associated with a proposed project have already adequately been addressed in the Program EIR, further environmental review is not required under the CEQA regulations (**Supporting Document 7**).

Further Concerns

Both documents indicate that because the project is “subject to various local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and permits (for example regulating water quality), the project will not have significant impacts”. Being “subject” to various authorities is not necessarily equivalent to being “compliant” with those authorities. Will SDSU or the City of San Diego ensure compliance with applicable authorities?

An additional concern with the Adobe Falls development is that it proposes to build some of its faculty housing on “steep slopes” which is specifically regulated under the *City of San Diego’s Municipal Code, Chapter 14, Environmentally Sensitive Lands Regulations*. The disturbance of steep slopes further increases the chance of hydrology and water quality impacts to the receiving waters.

Meeting with SDSU President Weber

I have formally requested to meet with SDSU President Weber at his earliest convenience to discuss how the University and the Conservancy can work together to further the Conservancy’s mission. Specifically, the meeting will focus on the proposed Adobe Falls North Campus Faculty Housing

Development and on the draft EIR. The details for the meeting have yet to be determined.

In addition, Ellie Oppenheim, (Acting Deputy City Manager, City of San Diego), has provided me with a contact name at SDSU that has been helpful to the City regarding previous land conservation negotiations. I plan to meet with this person as well.

The Draft EIR is tentatively scheduled to be heard by the Board of Trustees of California State University at their July 19-20, 2005 meeting in Long Beach, CA.

Paseo Redevelopment Project (Companion Project)

The Paseo is a \$315 million mixed-use project proposed by San Diego State University Foundation. It has been designated a Pilot Village Project by the City Council as part of the City's of Villages strategy. It consists of 465 residential units, 250,000 square feet of retail, 100,000 square feet of office space and a two-level subterranean parking garage with 1,922 spaces and 28 surface spaces. The project is generally located south of the SDSU campus, west of the public alley behind College Avenue, north of Montezuma Road and east of Campanile Drive.

The City Council, acting as the Redevelopment Agency, voted unanimously to enter into an Exclusive Negotiating Agreement with SDSU Foundation. The Relocation Plan and Replacement Housing Plan for the Paseo project were approved by the City Council on March 1, 2005.

Certification of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) by the City Council is scheduled to take place in July 2005. The EIR is required to evaluate existing conditions and any impacts created by the project, as well as propose potential mitigation measures and alternatives that might be adopted to avoid significant environmental impacts. The Draft Environmental Impact Report was released to the public for review and comment from April 5, 2005 through May 19, 2005. I have requested an extension to submit the Conservancy's comments.

Although I have not yet reviewed the EIR for the Paseo Project, likely concerns again *may* include with water quality, hydrology and Cumulative Impacts. I believe the Paseo Project will also discharge to Alvarado Creek thereby potentially increasing cumulative impacts with the Adobe Falls Project

and the Grantville Redevelopment Project. An excerpt of the Paseo EIR is attached. (**Supporting Document 6**)

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:

1. Conservancy Resolution 05-07, adopted April 8, 2005
2. Conservancy's Comments on the Draft EIR (**will be provided as soon as they are completed**)
3. Board Member verbatim comments from April 8, 2005 board meeting
4. "Big SDSU Project One Step Closer". San Diego Union Tribune. April 17, 2005.
5. "Project EIR Provides a Snapshot of 12-acre Urban Village at SDSU". San Diego Union Tribune. April 19, 2005.
6. "Hydrology and Water Quality" Chapter from the ***Draft Paseo at SDSU Environmental Impact Report***, April 2005.
7. CEQA Regulations, California Code of Regulations
8. Navajo Community Plan, 1982 (excerpts)

RECOMMENDATION: Accept Executive Officer Summary Report. Consider providing additional direction to the Executive Officer.